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Rough Draft, Background Summary, UN Decade for Women

Mildred Emory Persinger

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Article for
journal MP

The big news of the 20th Century, some scholars believe, is being made by women. One noted male observer of history in the making asserts that women are the only new force for change in the world.

But the higher levels of government and other institutions are paying little attention to the beaver-like efforts of women striving to become equal partners in the economic and social development of their countries. As women succeed, on the surface appear to change may come suddenly, rocking the systems invisible women had no part in shaping.

④ The big news ^{is} ~~will be~~ good news, judging by the World Plan of Action initiated and drafted by women and adopted by the United Nations-sponsored 1975 World Conference of International Women's Year. Unlike other pronouncements of intergovernmental bodies, this one reflects the perspective, the life-experience and the toil of women. UN Assistant Secretary-General, Helvi Sipila sees the World Plan, fundamentally ~~largely~~ the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as the global community's first comprehensive program for social justice. It is not for women only. Its ultimate aim, Mrs. Sipila says, is the well-being of every human person.

Like the numerous regional and national Plans which have flowed from it, implementation of the World Plan will depend on those who care: women, with the backing of supportive men. Three Years after the UN General Assembly endorsed the World Plan and established the 1976-1985 UN Decade for Women ~~1976-1985~~, programs for the integration of women have sprung up all over the UN system, in the regions and within countries.

41 UN

Regional training and research institutes for women are operating in Africa and the Asia/Pacific region. Others soon will be. An International Institute is about to open and UN regional Economic Commissions are adding women to their staffs to ^(be part of decisions on) ~~help with~~ projects being proposed by women in their regions. ^{Contributions to} ~~Financing for~~ those which are accepted comes from a Voluntary Fund for the Decade ^{to be financed by} ~~which~~ governments, ^{under pressure from} ~~pressed by~~ women, as was the Congress of the United States, ~~have contributed.~~

To give some of the principles reflected in the Plans and Programs the force of law, the UN is now considering a draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which governments will be asked to sign and ratify. Political struggles over the text, which represents some back-sliding from the UN's 1967 Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, has alerted supporters to the dangers of reaction.

In 1980, to assess progress toward the goals of the Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, the UN will hold a Mid-Decade World Conference. While its main themes will be employment, health and education, human rights issues, ^{including} ~~especially~~ the effects of apartheid on women, will be part of the action.

On the non-governmental side, international women's organizations are deeply involved in furthering Decade goals. UN-related non-governmental coalitions headquartered at the site of UN operations in Geneva and New York have held conferences on women and disarmament and on women and development with participants from all regions who have mapped out strategy. ^{New York-based} The/International Women's Tribune Centre ¹⁹⁷⁵ ^{Rome-based} ^{international} which grew out of the/IWY Tribune in Mexico and/ISIS, ~~also~~ ^{communication} centers, ^{which} keep correspondents and visitors in touch with world-wide women's development activity ranging from small income-generating projects

to research on the accessibility of health services to women.

Launching the Decade for Women in the United States, the National Women's Conference held November 19-21, 1977, in Houston, Texas, adopted another great humanitarian program which includes many of the elements of the ^{IWY}World Plan of Action. The NWC was probably the most diverse U.S. assembly ever held. And because there was proportionate representation of every sector of the U.S. population among the 4,000 delegates elected by 50 State Women's Meetings, the Plan they adopted was an authentic voice of women and a few concerned men delegates. Especially significant was the resolution on minorities, drafted by minority persons who were there. Even delegates who differed from the majority on such controversial issues as abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment endorsed the minority resolution overwhelmingly.

In seeking opportunities for women, the U.S. women's plan includes all persons who lack opportunity. It reaches out also to women in the Third World beyond U.S. shores, asking for more information and education about them and their societies. It urges that women themselves determine their own needs and solutions in U.S. international development assistance programs intended for their benefit, and that more women be recruited and upgraded in the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

The President has appointed an Advisory Committee for Women which is working on these and other Houston resolutions in the Plan of Action.

A Continuing Committee established by the Conference has also organized itself into caucuses related to each resolution which are now pressing for measures implementing domestic resolutions in the Plan of Action.

Houston recommendations on international affairs are ^{receiving attention from} ~~part of the work~~ of coalitions of U.S. organizations whose representatives report to their

boards on UN affairs and on Congressional action from New York and Washington.

The Overseas Education Fund

Organizations representing religious groups (which have long been working on behalf of women in developing countries), women voters, business and professional, ^(federally employed) university and "Y" women are monitoring legislation, ^{U.N. and U.S.} personnel practices and foreign aid policy to further check on the implementation of the international recommendations in the U.S. Plan.

Other parts of this network are community women's centres, small and large; new publications by and for women; women in sports; university women's studies programs; women's caucuses in professional organizations, foundations and labor unions; women in research on new indicators to replace inappropriate or non-existent ones; and political and legal activists.

All of this activity and more constitutes a movement ~~which will~~ ^{certain} ~~certain~~ inevitably bring about change. But the fact is that if ~~the~~ change had not already occurred, none of this would be happening.

Mildred Persinger

Note on draft - Vicki please circulate this with mail.

Please comment if you have time to read - It was done at the request of Presbyterian Women for Magazine "Concern".

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